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AUTHOR Workman, John F.; Kester, Donald L.
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ABSTRACT

Los Angeles Valley College's mental health program provided services at no cost to enrolled students in the areas of crisis counseling, short- and long-term individual treatment, group therapy, consultation, and referral. The program was funded through the college and the associated student body at a cost of $7,500 per year. After several personnel changes, declines in administrative and financial support led to the closure of the program. Prior to its closure, in an effort to save the mental health program, several concerned individuals at the college conducted a survey of 124 students from 5 health classes to assess student needs for mental health counseling. Two assessment instruments were used in the survey: an objective stress survey based on the design of Holmes and Rohe and an open-ended subjective stress survey. Results indicated that personal and social factors outranked academic stress-causing factors in the subjective survey and that only 5 of 24 stressors chosen by students in the objective stress survey were academic in nature. Despite these results, indicating the continuing need for a program dealing mainly with stress-induced counseling needs arising outside the academic area, the program was discontinued. (HB)

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DOWN THE FINANCIAL DRAIN:

A COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM PROVIDED THROUGH AN ON-CAMPUS PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES CENTER BY A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AND FOUR DOCTORAL PSYCHOLOGY INTERNS GOES "DOWN THE DRAIN"

By

John F. Workman, Ph.D.
Counselor
Los Angeles Valley College
Van Nuys, California

and

Donald L. Kester, Ph.D.
Consultant
Educational Program Evaluation and Research
Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools
Downey, California

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I. Los Angeles Valley College

Los Angeles Valley College is one of ten community colleges operated by the Los Angeles Community College District - the "largest" college district in the nation. The district is called the "largest" because it serves more community college students than any other district in the nation. As of Fall, 1981, published enrollment figures for nine colleges totalled approximately 135,000. Los Angeles Valley College is located in Van Nuys, a suburban community north of Hollywood. In the Fall of 1981, Los Angeles Valley College had a total student enrollment of 21,330.

II. Valley's Mental Health Program

The staff was composed of a clinical director; Tony Alfano, Ph.D., a licensed clinical psychologist, and doctoral level psychology interns. It offered the following services to all enrolled students at no cost:

- Crisis Counseling - The student was provided with assistance in dealing with stress experiences requiring immediate attention; for example, suicide prevention and rape counseling.

- Short-Term Individual Treatment - This was a program of treatment focused on situational problems, usually six weeks long.

- Long-Term Individual Treatment - Longer term assistance was available for special problem areas.

- Group Therapy - Small groups of six to eight members working together, met on an on-going basis.

- Consultation - Consultation was available to individuals, groups and organizations on campus, both student and faculty.

- Psychological Assessment - Formal evaluation and psycho-diagnostic testing was provided as deemed necessary.

- Referral - Referral to appropriate community resources and agencies was provided when indicated.

All records of personal counseling and psychotherapy were kept confidential and were not part of the student's academic records.

III. How Was It Funded?

The mental health program of the "Psych Center" was funded by the Health Office, the Associated Student Body Organization, and the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services Office. A counselor at Valley College estimated that the center cost approximately $7,500 per year to operate.

IV. The Money Crunch Problem

The lack of financial support which caused the elimination of the Center flowed from personnel changes as much as anything else. Two of the on-campus leaders, who had spearheaded the creation and continued funding of the Center, left. Bill Lewis, The Dean of Students, who had persuaded the student organization to provide some monies for its support, left to become Dean of Students at Los Angeles Pierce College. The College Nurse, who provided part of her office space, plus monies from her health office budget, retired. In addition, Dr. Alice Thurston, the previous President of Valley College, who had been an administrator and a supporter of student personnel services, resigned. The new people, who replaced these administrators, simply were not as supportive of the Mental Health Program as their predecessors had been.

Without any money on which to operate, the program folded as of July, 1982. Before it "went under" a concerted attempt was made to save it.

V. An Unsuccessful Attempt to Save It

Before the program was allowed to die, a number of concerned individuals decided to conduct a mental health counseling needs assessment. The assessment was conducted and the data analyzed during 1980-1981. In October of 1981-82, the results were presented at the state-wide conference of the California College Personnel Association. Since that paper is in the ERIC system, only a few of the highlights will be presented.

The sample of students (N = 124) were from five health classes, day and evening sections. A comparison of the students in the sample and the total students in Valley College on such variables as age and sex indicated that, while the sample was not precisely representative, it was judged to be reasonably close enough for purposes of the needs assessment.

The assessment instruments were two in number; there was an objective stress survey based on one by Holmes and Rahe (1967), and there was an open-ended subjective stress survey. The results of each supported the other. What the students in the sample "said" in the objective survey, they seemed also to "say" in the subjective survey. In short, the students said that there were many stressors and that a very large proportion of those stressors were in the "personal/social" area as opposed to the "academic." Since the "Psych Center" program was set up to specifically deal with "heavy" needs outside the academic area, those who presented needs assessments results felt the results, easily and strongly, supported the continuation of the program.

More specially, the sample students' reports were distributed in the way shown in Table I below:

TABLE I

Ranking of Categories of Stressors
Subjective Stress Survey

	Category	Number of Responses
1.	Personal/Social	153
2.	Academic	71
3.	Vocational/Money Related	45
4.	Multiple Stress Situations	39
5.	Health Related	35
6.	Family Related	33
7.	Miscellaneous	9

A similar message came through based on the results of the objective stress survey. Again the students seemed to be "saying" that the "personal/social" area was the big area in which they, or their friends, experienced stressors. This is shown in the abbreviated Table, Table 2, on the following page. Asterisks indicate those stresses which might be considered academic. As can be seen at a glance, the areas other than academic were heavily checked. Unfortunately, it did not matter what the students "said" they needed, the program was killed anyway.

TABLE II

Ranking of Stressors by Average Stress
Objective Stress Survey

Stressor		Number Choosing	Average Stress
* 1.	Serious Argument with Instructor	1	5.0
2.	Death of a Close Friend	5	4.0
* 3.	Failed Important Course	1	4.0
4.	Pregnancy	1	4.0
5.	Serious Argument with Close Friend	8	4.0
6.	Single Parent Responsibilities	3	4.0
7.	Divorce	2	4.0
8.	Breakup of Boyfriend/Girlfriend	8	3.9
9.	Chronic Car Trouble	10	3.8
*10.	Lower Grades Than Expected	6	3.7
11.	Change of Health of Family Member	9	3.6
12.	New Girl or Boyfriend	12	3.5
*13.	Increased Workload at School	11	3.5
14.	Outstanding Personal Achievement	2	3.5
15.	Financial Worries	17	3.5
16.	Change in Job	8	3.5
17.	Child Care Concerns	5	3.4
18.	Sex Problems	8	3.3
*19.	Dropped More Than One Class	3	3.3
20.	Death of Close Family Member	5	3.0
21.	General Worry	16	3.2
22.	Change in Eating Habits	7	3.1
23.	Major Personal Injury or Illness	5	3.0
24.	Fired From Job	1	3.0

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